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AP Language and Composition (5th)

24 February 2013

The Primal Pursuit

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche believes that mankind is driven to action by a will to power, an innate force that motivates members of mankind to endeavor in achieving the utmost highest level in life rather than benevolence and goodwill as in the values of institutional religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In addition, Nietzsche claims that attempts to preserve institutional morals serve only as contrivances to prevent members of mankind from heeding their calls to power, and the absoluteness of said morals has assisted them in suppressing the common man for the majority of mankind’s existence. Proponents of his argument point toward power figures to support Nietzsche’s assertion because they exemplify the concept of the will to power by acquiring far much more power than their peers expect yet still seek to obtain more. Opponents of the concept of mankind’s will to power will point Sigmund Freud’s pleasure principle, which essentially serves as the foundation of Epicureanism and states that mankind is driven to action in the pursuit of maximum pleasure. However, said opponents (conveniently) neglect scenarios in which both the will to power and the pleasure principle are present. I concur with Nietzsche and his concept of the will to power for a plethora of reasons. First, historical power figures demonstrate to what lengths members of mankind will go for power, despite how much influence they may already have. Second, literary works and stories including Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, *The 48 Laws of Power*, Greek mythology, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Daybreak* (the last two literary pieces are both works of Nietzsche) provide further textual evidence of a struggle which is steadily becoming more clandestine in nature. Third, prominent, modern-day echelons in the worlds of athletics, music, and nuclear arms exhibit how, despite mankind’s “civilization” and improvements in standard of living, the desire for influence remains immutable.

Consider Hitler. A repugnant, pernicious smog encompasses the very name, striking fear into the hearts of Jews and adversaries in World War II Germany and, mixed with a mist of apprehension, diffused to the rest of Europe as Hitler’s stormtroopers ravaged battlegrounds between Germany and France. Freshly out of prison postceding his authorship of *Mein Kampf,* Hitler ascends to power within the German government by delivering evocative speeches to extract support from plebian customers inside pubs; he enamors the impoverished masses, pub by pub, with promises of a resurrected Germany, but audience members who he cannot beguile know his ideal objective: Germany subjugating a global conglomerate of nations. Hitler’s unveils his desire to establish a global empire under German rule when he violates the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a nonaggression pact he signs in 1939 Moscow to prevent belligerent action between Germany and the Soviet Union. Historians frequently censure Hitler for his treachery, claiming that Hitler’s initial attempts to restrain combat to one war front serves as the primary reason as to how Germany contends so well in World War . Obviously, these critics underestimate the will to power; their egregious error in judgment beckons attention to itself because, consider that members of mankind persistently pursue power, they would know that Hitler’s questionable sanity is not the sole explanation for a campaign decision so devoid of military prowess. Power, the demon of men, overwhelms Hitler and persuades him to believe that dominance supersedes practical matters such as timing and war strategy (Nietzsche 187). “Alright, I acknowledge your evidence of the will to power,” Nietzsche’s typical opponent may admit, “but that is only one example. Also, Hitler isn’t the best example, seeing as how he has a wee bit more than a spark of madness in his veins. There is no other example within close chronological proximity to support the concept of power.” Although the general consensus today is that Hitler was a power-hungry fool, his rise to power is not the only instance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to exemplify the unrelenting pursuit of power. The opponent is mistaken to a humbling extent; he only has to glance at the epoch of time between the Civil War and World War I to take note of bellicose, militaristic, and imperialistic actions taken by nations, such as Great Britain and France, nations that history students typically view with an ameliorative perspective. The Opium Wars, in which European power Great Britain flooded Chinese streets with opium in order to gain leverage in trading, and the struggle between European nations to colonize pieces of Africa both serve as examples of competition for power between nations that are not frequently antagonized.

“Okay, the will to power has revealed itself on numerous occasions within the course of history,” the obstinate naysayer may concede, “but the idea of the will to power must be textualized by an author other than Nietzsche and ideally implemented within said text in order to be recognized as a concept universal to all of mankind.” Examine Machiavelli’s *The Prince*; Machiavelli authors *The Prince* to advise an inexperienced Italian prince on how to obtain power and how said prince should assert his dominance over other contenders. This political treatise not only supports the argument for the will to power by providing more historical evidence, but also is similar to examining a rock climbing wall prior to ascent: *The Prince* produces insight into the path a prince aspiring for regal authority must ascend in order to reach and remain on top of the power structure of mid-sixteenth century Italy. The fact that a European prince, someone who we guarantee a lifetime of affluence and influence in modern-day society, must struggle for power serves as evidence to the will to power because, if an heir must protect his right to the throne, one can deduce that the will to power drives other contenders to strive for regality through increasingly drastic measures. One can even deduce further (if he is especially privy), that even under such a relatively restrictive (compared to the present-day United States) government, subjects are liable to rise up and assert their collective power over the monarch should he become abusive and malignant (“Overview: The Prince”). The opponent, floundering for even a mediocre counterargument to latch onto and regain balance, may whine, “But his advice doesn’t even work anymore!” He stands on treacherous floes for a few precious seconds before, weighted by moot points, descending into the icy waters of irrelevancy. True, the abuse of power for self-gain is intolerable today, but if someone is truly serious in his pursuit of power, he will act in accordance to law fifteen of Robert Greene’s *48 Laws of Power*, and crush his adversaries to the point where he need not fear reciprocation for selfish action (Greene 107). An example of complete domination in practice would be the Greek ransacking of Troy in Homer’s epic *The Iliad*. After infiltrating Troy within the inside of a wooden “gift” horse, Odysseus and the other Achaean infantry members essentially brought Troy as a whole to its knees, gleefully decapitate it, and uplift its severed head to the gods of Olympus in triumph. If the Achaeans failed to follow their will to power, then the descendants of fallen Trojans soldier may have sought vengeance for the massacre of their fathers and the plundering of their city.

Despite the historical and textual evidence in support of the will to power, the more stalwart opponent frequently asserts that its validity is irrelevant, proclaiming, “Nietzsche’s concept of power is not even applicable anymore; the human race is much more civilized. Long gone are the days in which men engage in barbaric competition. Do you see gladiator matches? No. Do you see absolute monarchies? No. My point is that the will to power, like Nietzsche's concept of master-slave mortality, is obsolete because, like the existence of (legal) coerced labor, power struggles of that sort have faded as mankind become more civilized.” I must admit, I have yet to witness a modern-day gladiator. However, I frequently see games of rugby; I watch musicians across multiple genres, from rappers to rockstars, unabashedly parade themselves about in their music videos like jackasses, boasting of sexual encounters and opulence as signs of power. I listen to politically unstable nations like Iran and North Korea release threats against the United States and engage the United States in a sort of New Age arms race by augmenting nuclear proliferation. All of these examples display the relevance of Nietzsche’s concept in the world today, but Nietzsche’s typical opponent may argue that power struggles are few and far in between; they may argue that the will to power has no presence in the mundane lifestyle of the typical person. Counterexamples from my own experiences render this claim invalid.

Imagine a city in Georgia, known for its virtually nonexistent peach trees. Suppose the climate in this city fluctuates, being blissful one day and bothersome the next. Suppose that on a particular Saturday, March 2nd, 2013, a high school track meet jerks a sleep-deprived student-athlete from his short-lived affair with the coquette known as dormancy. I enter this scenario when I arose from slumber 7 days ago. I assemble my uniform, devour my breakfast, and dive into my mom’s Honda Odyssey to rush to Starr’s Mill High School for the Panther Relays. My departure from the car upon arrival resembles a descent to the ninth circle of hell: the air is frigid and icy, piercing my soul through skin pores like minute daggers. The insulation my attire provides is negligible and the winds are merciless; it seemed more like a Netflix and Nutella day than a day to leave the house and run. For the first time in my three seasons of McIntosh track and field, I contemplate skipping the meet. My thoughts shift positively when I gaze into the stands and notice how many teams are attending the meet. One hour later, I step to the starting line for the 3200m. The temperature is nothing short of boreal, but I am radiating with confidence. I look to my left and see apprehensive faces; a furtive glance to my right yields the same results. I am the only one with a smirk on his face when a meet official fires the starting pistol. During my fifth of eight laps, I engage one of my two rivals from Starr’s Mill in a brutal game of leapfrog: I would sprint past him, he would surge past me, I would lengthen my stride to match him, and so on and so forth. During the final lap, he accelerates to diverge from me. This increase in pace is the first indicator of fear. I stride until I’m parallel with him. He looks at me uneasily; this look is his second and final mistake. I return his gaze with a different face altogether. I feel a loathing of manic intensity bubbling within the dark pools of my pupils as I bore a hole into his psyche. My look and my persistence convey my message: my will to power dominates your will to power. I then proceed to pass him and his teammate to dominate all of Starr’s Mill’s athletes in that race with a time of 11:03. Conditioning and consuming a proper diet serve as integral components to successful race performance, but a will to power over other contenders or his own weakness drives a runner to successful finish races and seek lower finishing times.

Let’s say that the opponent of Nietzsche’s concept introduces Freud’s pleasure principle, the concept that people are innately driven to seek pleasure. That concept can coexist with the will to power if and only if it defer to the will to power because, according to patrician and talented musician Kanye West, one derives true power by being capable of let power go and forgo pleasure (*My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* “Power”). Exactly one week after the Starr’s Mill meet, I throw a party at my house to celebrate my seventeenth birthday. I assure my anxious mother that I will take care of everything and temporarily assume the role as the man of the house. Around nine in the evening, the guests roll in, my speakers are blaring, and I know that there will be ample conversation material for Monday morning. Then the accidents begin to occur. Drinks are spilled, crumbs are scattered, and I could feel anarchy entering my abode. At first hysteria infiltrates my mind, but then I realize that, by inviting so many people to my home, I relinquish control of the scenery until all guest depart. At the climax of the gathering, I experience a euphoria reserved for only leaders of men: the feeling of being the “man of the hour”. Reminiscing as I pen this paper, I have come to realize how bad of an idea it is for one to host somewhere between 30 and 40 people at his house on a Saturday night when he has a paper due the following Monday. I obviously adhere to the pleasure principle by throwing a party and pursuing some much needed pleasure after taking the SAT that morning. Ironically, my decision also exemplifies my will to power over this essay because I will not let the deadline on this paper dictate to me when it will be written. Call me young and brash and foolish, but I am the master of my own fate and I will assert my control over what I do with my time.

Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power is irrefutably valid because an ample amount of evidence exists in mankind’s past, present, and future. Furthermore, his concept maintains its presence on both fictional and nonfictional texts. The will to power is not reserved for eminent members of society; it is a universal motivation observable across all of mankind and therefore universal. If one examines the pleasure principle superficially, it appears to contradict the will to power, but, after more meticulous inspection, will discover that they are not diametrically opposed.

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